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ABSTRACT

The authors describe a one-quarter, undergraduate teacher education experience that involved a high level of personal freedom and synergy in an attempt to develop humanistic teachers. Twenty-three juniors and seniors were involved in the program, which took the form of an unstructured block of courses in mathematics, science, and social studies. Three instructors were in charge of the block and taught both individually and in teams. Eleven goals were outlined for the course, the first two of which had to be student-initiated. The balance were devoted to viewing math, science, and social studies as human endeavors for which appropriate psychological, philosophical, and practical bases had to be developed. The result hoped for was that each student (and the three teachers) would develop skills that would make the curriculum and/or classroom evolve in a synergetic rather than competitive fashion. Personal freedom was retained to the maximum level to allow students to pursue the stated goals of the course and also to develop their own journals to reflect their readings in the field, personal reactions to the course, evaluations of self, teachers, and program, and miscellany at the students' discretion. Both student and professorial reaction to the program was highly positive, with an emerging consensus that students and teachers were more capable of honest, open relationships and the pursuit of educational goals in a setting of interpersonal cooperation and personal freedom. (MB)

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Personal Freedom + Synergy = A Humanistic Teacher

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The Chinese, in the book of I Ching, speak of a duality in nature to which they have used the metaphors Yang (meaning light, or the creative, or time, or masculine) and Yin (meaning dark, or the receptive, or space, or feminine). The integration of both modes gives wholeness to experience. Half of this duality provides only a fragmented view of the world, and leads to incomplete experiencing. As humans we experience a duality of being with respect to our personal freedom and our relationships with fellow humans. Personal freedom is the seed for self-actualization, and synergy is the basis of the human values of love, cooperation and togetherness. The synthesis or integration of this duality (the two separate modes of being) provides us with a humanistic experience. Since complete experiencing occurs only when the metaphors of Yang and Yin are integrated, it is likely that a humanistic teacher emerges only if synergy and personal freedom are complimentary. This paper describes an experience whereby the theoretical concepts of synergy and personal freedom were the core conditions in an educational course for 23 undergraduate students and three faculty members.

Background and Setting

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This is a description of a one quarter experience which combined mathematics, science and social studies methods into a single course. The block, as it is called, with an enrollment of 23 undergraduate juniors and seniors, was taught by three faculty members, one from each of the three content areas. The block met on campus the first four and last two weeks of the quarter: the other four weeks were spent in a public elementary school. During the school experience the students in the block worked with elementary children in the areas of mathematics, science and social studies.

During the quarter we planned a teaching strategy in which there was a balance among the three instructors teaching together and teaching individually. The sessions

with all three of us involved special activities such as lessons to integrate content, rap sessions, self concept (of the people in class) sessions, and classroom meetings. Individual sessions were planned to deal with methods and materials of mathematics, science and social studies.

The goals of the block were presented to the students the first day of class and included the following:

- 1.
- 2.
3. Experiencing Math, Science and Social Studies as a human endeavor.
4. Developing a perspective on the psychological and philosophical bases of education.
5. Experiencing education as a process of creativity, discovery, and invention.
6. Becoming aware of materials and approaches for teaching.
7. Being responsible for our own learning and growth, and cooperating in the growth of others in this class. In short, experiencing a synergistic process.
8. Reacting to a process of learning in a class in which the door is slightly ajar rather than closed.
9. Developing skills to help make your curriculum and/or classroom more synergistic.
10. Developing our attitude toward teaching in terms of wholeness, openness, specificity and commitment.
11. Reading, exploring and reacting to ideas in the domain of math, science and social studies education.

The first two goals are blank because we invited each student to initiate his or her own goals. We based this on the notion that self-initiated learning is the most lasting and pervasive and on the fact that we told the students that we hoped that each of us (including the teachers) would accept responsibility for our own learning and evaluation.

We hope to present in the remainder of this paper evidence that suggests that undergraduate students preparing to become teachers who are given the freedom to pursue individual goals and work in a cooperative (synergistic) environment based on love and trust develop an outlook on teaching that we are calling humanistic. The

sections that follow present our experience with the concepts of personal freedom and synergy. We also provide an evaluation of the experience based on opinions of our students and our personal accounts.

Personal Freedom

By sunrise there were nearly a thousand birds standing outside the circle of students, looking curiously at Maynard. They didn't care whether they were seen or not, and they listened trying to understand Jonathan Seagull.

He spoke of very simple things -- that it is right for a gull to fly, that freedom is the very nature of his being, that whatever stands against that freedom must be set aside, be it ritual or superstition or limitation in any form.

"Set aside," came a voice from the multitude, "even if it be the Law of the Flock?"

"The only true law is that which leads to freedom," Jonathan said. "There is no other." (Bach, 1970, p.88)

Carl Rogers (1969, p.232), one of the leading proponents of providing students the freedom to learn, wrote that freedom unleashes curiosity and permits individuals and groups to pursue their own goals. They become explorers who can try to find the meaning of their lives in the work they are doing and often work twice as hard.

According to Kolesnik (1975, pp. 33-35) the concept of personal autonomy or self-determinization is paramount in the thinking of humanists. They believe that freedom of choice is very likely the most important human characteristic because human behavior is largely a consequence of personal choice. The influences of heredity and environment are real, say the humanists, but do not determine how an individual will act. People are free to choose how to behave within the limits set by heredity and a broad array of choices are open to them as to how they will live within their environments. In short, every person is free to set his or her own goals and to select

the means that will be employed to attain them.

Personal freedom is the basis for self-regulation, self-assertion, and self-actualization. Humanists believe that personal freedom provides opportunities for the development of personal integrity and responsibility, initiative and creativity, altruism and love, and are implicit in the concepts of justice, morality, and citizenship. For these reasons humanists believe that personal freedom is especially appropriate for a democratic society.

Applying Personal Freedom in the Classroom

In the mathematics-science-social studies methods course, personal freedom was one of the key elements. This freedom was built into the course from the very beginning when students were encouraged to add to the instructors' list of course goals. During the course considerable freedom was also provided students in the selection and organization of learning experiences. Rather than requiring students to complete assignments determined by the instructors, students were asked to develop portfolios -- loose leaf portable folders containing things that they did related to the course. The materials that were collected and placed in the folders were not there to be judged, but rather to be a reflection of each student's accomplishments based on the individual's desires and interests. We requested students to include the following in their portfolios:

1. Readings -- A list of the readings that they have done for the course with an indication of the way that they read the book, chapter, or article and their reaction to each reading. No specific readings were required nor was there any minimum number of required readings established by the instructors. Each student was free to make those decisions.
2. Bright Ideas for Teaching -- This is a collection of ideas that each student encountered during the quarter that they think might be useful in the classroom. These ideas came from readings, class activities, fellow students, observations in the public schools, or anywhere else.

3. Psychological Journal -- Each student was asked to keep a journal of personal thoughts and feelings. The purpose of the journal was to encourage self awareness as a human being and prospective teacher. Students were not asked to place their entire journals in their portfolios. Excerpts of the student's own choosing were requested.
4. Personal Evaluation -- Each student was asked to include a statement of evaluation of personal progress in the course and indicate the course grade that was considered to be appropriate. Students were required to list the goals or criteria by which their grading judgments were made and describe the ways in which they met or failed to meet each.
5. Course Evaluation -- Each student was asked to include in the portfolio a personal reaction to the course. Honest statements about what the course meant to them, both positively and negatively, were solicited. Criticisms were especially sought as were recommendations for improving the course.
6. Miscellaneous -- Any additional materials could be included in the portfolio at the student's discretion.

In addition to the portfolio, each student was asked to meet with the instructors at least once during the quarter either individually or in small groups. The nature of these meetings were intentionally left unstructured so that whatever topics seemed appropriate could be explored.

Almost no course requirements were mandated by the instructors other than the general course goals and the development of portfolios. Individual students were required to establish their own assignments based on the course goals and their own interests. Instructors often described learning experiences that previous students had found to be useful but did not require these. Feedback was given to students regarding their work whenever the instructors were asked for it.

Each student was free to determine how much time to spend on a topic, free to work independently or in groups, and free to change groups. Students were free to

use any materials in the classroom, the science laboratory, and in the curriculum laboratory and were free to bring into the classroom additional materials of their own choosing. Students were free to self initiate their own activities and free to share ideas in any way that they liked. Finally, they were free to evaluate their own progress according to the criteria they set and free to evaluate the course and the instructors.

Let us look now at the extent to which students in the course perceived personal freedom and their reactions to this freedom. Here are some typical statements from students:

"This course created no pressures. It was so easy to learn. You could explore the areas you wanted to and learn what you think could benefit you as a teacher."

"The grading system for the class is great! Who knows better about what you have done than yourself. I feel that I have done more for an 'A' than any other 'A' I have been given. I earned this 'A'."

"This course has been one of the best experiences of my life. For once I actually enjoyed getting up and coming to school." . . . "I'll admit that at the first of the quarter I wasn't sure if I was going to feel 'secure' in the class. I felt uneasy because I wasn't told exactly what was expected of me. I found that it was much harder for me to have to set my own goals and to decide what I expected to do myself. But this experience taught me a lot about myself." . . . "You have all taught me to look inside myself . . ."

"To say the course has been a different experience would be a definite understatement. For that reason alone I don't think I got as much out of it as I might have. I loved having a choice in what I was doing and whether or not I'd even do it at all. This was, however, an awesome responsibility for someone so programmed into having her thinking done for her. There were times when I would have appreciated more guidance in what I was doing. But, most of

the time, I appreciated your confidence in us to do what we decided we needed to do. For the first time since I've been in the School of Education, I've been encouraged to think for myself, develop my own personal style of teaching, think about my philosophy of teaching." . . . "I've used this quarter primarily to work on getting my personal growth together. I'm developing a philosophy of life and toward teaching, as opposed to the past when I just wandered in education, doing what I've been told and never thinking for myself." . . . "It has been rather difficult for me to direct myself this quarter and make my own decisions but I've done much better than I ever dreamed I would and so am rather pleased. I am very much aware of what I think are great strides forward have been made in me as a teacher."

"We were responsible for our own education. I chose to read articles and books which interested me, and in this process became aware of materials and approaches for teaching. . . . In comparing my progress during this quarter to fifteen years of education in a more traditional setting, I feel that I have made tremendous strides toward becoming the kind of teacher that I want to be. This course has had more of an impact on me than the others put together." . . . "I especially appreciated the freedom that we were given to express our concerns and feeling about our classrooms and the course." . . . "The problem solving framework of the course was very challenging because it made me say to myself, 'What am I going to do tomorrow and next week?' This is certainly more realistic than the instructor telling me exactly what to do each day."

"I really liked the way we were free to make our own decisions regarding course requirements and evaluation. I feel like I have a better idea about the kind of teacher I want to be now. I can hardly wait to start teaching."

We would be less than honest if we implied that all of the students found the

degree of personal freedom permitted in the course to be appropriate. Here are a couple of statements typical of a more critical viewpoint:

"I was somewhat disappointed in this course. I enjoyed the freedom, the informality, and the lack of pressure, but I feel like I was cheated in some ways. I believe that creativity, discovery, and invention are important in education, but are not everything." . . . "I would have appreciated knowing what you thought I should get out of this course."

"It seems to me that more class time could have been spent learning methods and techniques of teaching rather than evaluating the class. I appreciated the opportunity to evaluate the class but this could have been done in one session. Fantasy trips and games have a value and a place in education but I feel children need to learn that we live in a real world."

Our assessment of the impact of giving students personal freedom in the course is this: Overall, we saw a majority of students assume initiative and grow personally and professionally to a greater extent than we have witnessed when we taught previous classes in a more traditional manner. The degree of personal freedom placed on students resulted in a fairly high level of anxiety for many students at the beginning of the quarter. This seemed to diminish greatly for most, but not all, students. A few continued to believe that it is the instructor's responsibility to designate course objectives, make specific assignments, and to evaluate student progress and assign grades.

We have two suggestions to offer to those who are inclined to permit considerable personal freedom in their classes. First, the nature of the course and the degree of personal freedom allowed should be made known to students before they register for the course. In this way students who would prefer another type of situation can exercise available options that might be more personally satisfying to them. Second, a humanistically-oriented teacher education program could be organized so that stu-

dents who wish to experience personal freedom can do so over an extended period of time rather than just for a single quarter. Thus, students would become accustomed to personal freedom and would be better able to derive its fullest benefits.

Synergy

"I have also become aware of the synergistic approach to education. I don't think I realized, before this quarter the importance of getting along and the importance of the realization that I am only one part of the process of learning. Ann and I have shared experiences, concerns, and excitement during the quarter. This has meant so much to me I can't begin to explain.

A student enrolled in the block.

One of the goals of the instructors was to develop a high synergy environment. The anthropologist Ruth Benedict (Mead, 1959) used the term to describe the social and psychological interaction certain American Indian groups. Her studies of synergy dealt with the ways in which institutions and groups in a culture either worked together and so released human energy or else were contradictory and discrepant and so dissipated human energy. She observed the following as characteristics of low synergy groups.

- competitive actions
- limited love and trust
- separateness of existence
- threatened---not able to cope with change
- closed energy system

Conversely she noted that some groups were quite different and observed the following characteristics of high synergy.

- cooperative actions
- open love and caring
- wholeness---togetherness

adaptable to change

open energy system

Buckminster Fuller has written that synergy is the only word in our language that means behavior of whole systems unpredicted by the separately observed behaviors of any of the system's separate parts or subassembly of the system's parts. We thought of high synergy in the classroom context as an environment where the combined action or operation of individuals leads to a total effect that is greater than the sum of individual actions or operation in the group. The environment that we wished to establish was based on the cooperative use of power, not competition for power. We assumed that the cooperative use of power would promote security in individuals, increase sharing among students and teachers, and enhance each person's self-concept.

We also believed that individuals could be transformed in spirit and mind in a high synergy environment. We felt that by restructuring the rules of learning, students would compete against their own limits rather than each other's. Thus the inevitability of self-evaluation. Also by structuring the environment as a high synergy one, we could involve the individuals in a joyous experience that might create a sense of community and belonging. The students (and we) could focus on the joy of learning, cooperating, and trusting rather than on striving to win, that is to get an "A".

Applying Synergy in the Classroom

Application of the concept of synergy is more than just following a set of ground rules. It means, instead, a commitment to a philosophy of life---a renewal of the basic nature of human beings, a species which is cooperative and loving rather than competitive and hating. Bob Samples((1976, p. 209) writes:

"It is a vision enfolded in each of us . . . in the person . . . not the culture. Thus the transformation toward synergic culture will be the summary act of willing, personal rebirth. While the competitive, nonsynergic cultures war among themselves, the synergic vision is unfolding in the personal spheres of loving . . . marriage . . . parenting. Competition, the negative version of

unity, is dying. In culture as in nature it is seen to be useless. Synergy, the positive version of unity, is dawning in the human mind. It always has been with us."

Our commitment was to the process, not the content. We encouraged and tried to exhibit behaviors that focused on cooperation. We also engaged the students in activities that exemplified high synergy. First, some comments on behaviors, then a discussion of some of the activities we used.

Synergistic behaviors. In a high synergy environment students and teachers are working together. It's that simple. Each is coordinated with each other so that any insight, joy or breakthrough for one person is an insight, joy and breakthrough for others in the group. One person's high is not another's low. Here are specifics regarding the coordination of energy.

1. Students had the power to grade themselves.
2. Students were encouraged to share ideas in any way they wanted.
3. Student's work was kept in individual portfolios that could be shared with others.
4. Students were free to bring anything they wanted into the class.
5. Students were encouraged to consult others in the classroom as resource persons.
6. Students were encouraged to consider their total community as a primary resource.

There is evidence from student evaluations that the cooperative use of energy did occur this quarter. Here are comments by two students:

"... my class mates were a great help in realizing a synergistic process. It was wonderful to share ideas and feelings with one another. It is unbelievable what can be accomplished when you put your heads together."

"... my third goal (to share my ideas and discoveries with others) has been relatively easy to achieve because of the atmosphere created by the instructors. There is no need for us to compete as we have done in the

past. All of my classmates seem to be sharing, and so have I. It is very pleasant to be allies instead of competitors. I hope I work in a school where teachers share ideas and discoveries.'

Synergistic activities. We also did activities in the classroom that were based on cooperation. One of the first was to ask each student to share two or three articles on education with the class. These were placed in a file drawer and were available to each student in the class. No one was pressured (required) to read any of these. However, at the end of the quarter when we read the portfolios most students had read not only these articles, but books that had been recommended by us and other students beyond our expectations.

Another synergistic activity was the classroom meeting which was developed by Glasser (1969). The classroom meeting symbolized the unity, the cooperation and the individual uniqueness and equality of each person. It served as a chief process to achieve a synergistic classroom. In a sense it was ritualistic and was a celebration of our humanness.

Our meetings were conducted in a circle for about 30 minutes. We did this once per week at the beginning of the quarter, and then daily when we had moved to the elementary school.

Here are a few of the topics:

1. What do you think of the structure of this course? What do you like about it? Dislike?
2. What problems are you having with the personal freedom you have?
3. What have you been reading that has been of interest to you?
4. What do you think of humanistic education?
5. Why do you want to teach? What kind of a teacher do you want to be?
6. What were some of your reactions, both positive and negative to this class?

The meetings were designed to deal with issues of immediate relevance to the persons in the course. In some cases the topics were generated by the students and

in other cases by the teachers. We hoped that the meetings would be the forum whereby each person had the right and the responsibility to share thoughts, problems, feelings, and clarify values in a cooperative manner rather than in a competitive, and usual "behind the back" manner. There was no attempt to reach agreement on issues, but to honor the values of trust, disagreement, honesty, caring and love.

In addition to cooperative reading and classroom meetings, we participated in the following activities. It's important to note that the instructors were as much a part of the group as any student during these activities.

Synectics. This is a creative way to solve problems using metaphors and involves the cooperation of rational and nonrational thinking. It is based on free communication techniques, and dismissal of external evaluation standards. Synectics involves several stages as follows (Earth Science Preparation Project, 1974):

1. The facilitator encourages individuals to articulate problems important to them. These are listed on a large sheet of paper or the chalkboard. The group either selects one of the problems, or combines some of the suggestions to form a new problem.
2. The facilitator tells the group to think about the problem and to call out words or phrases that come to mind. These are written on a large sheet of paper. Participants should be encouraged to build upon each other's ideas. The process continues until ideas lag.
3. The next stage moves from the rational to the nonrational. The group is asked to proceed as before, but this time nonsense words or phrases should be called out. These can be "new" words, or combinations of rational words, and are written on a separate sheet of paper, as were the rational words.
4. The next stage is that of creating metaphors. Participants are asked to use the lists of rational and nonrational words to create a list of metaphoric responses as solutions to the problem. The list can be reduced to one or several words depending on group preference. Metaphors may also be combined.

5. The process can continue by exploring the metaphors further. The metaphor can also be translated into unmistakable language.

New Games. This is a form of play in which the prize is play itself and is the basis of New Games Foundation which is more fully developed in The New Games Book. New games develop trust and cooperation and, unlike most games used in education, they are used to celebrate our abilities and not so much to compare them. We played some of George Leonard's (1975) energy games, such as the lap game, doors and walls, and Anoeta. Ecology tag, described by Leonard (p. 265) is an example of one of the types of games that we were involved in. Here is how to play this game:

As many people as you wish can play this game. Lay out a course about a quarter of a mile long. Designate a place called home base. From there take all the players on a nature hike along the course. During the hike, point out the names of a dozen or so trees, flowers, plants, or rock outcrops.

At the end of the course have players reach into a bag. Those that draw out "it" cards are "it" (one "it" for every five players). The object of the game is to get back to home base without being tagged by an "it" player. Players are safe whenever they are touching one of the identified objects. "It" players may challenge players to name the plant or rock they are touching. If they fail to identify the plant or rock (you might have cards placed on the plants and rocks that can only be read by "it" players to eliminate arguments), they are considered tagged and are out of the game. All players who reach home base are winners.

Action Learning. We might well call this metaphoric learning (Samples, 1976).

Many activities throughout the course focused on the functions of the right hemisphere of the brain. These included fantasy trips, nonverbal acting, pantomime and role playing. Here are some specific examples:

- Convince someone that Earth rotates.
- Imagine yourself as one part of the human body and explain your structure and function.
- Enact a bird learning to fly.
- Enact a congressional debate about a clean air bill.
- Enact an astronaut's weightlessness in space.
- Select a concept and have the children act it out using their bodies, for example, light, gravity, mass, volume, speed.
- Find or invent something which when put together does something that the collection of its parts cannot do.
- Invent a substitute for a common object and evaluate your invention.
- Select a controversial issue for which there is no absolute right or wrong. Try to find an alternative view that would be satisfying to people of opposing views.

Conclusions

Does personal freedom plus synergy result in a more humanistic person and teacher? We have presented in this paper a description of our experiences with respect to this question. We believe that we can say yes. Although the data are subjective we think they are very consistent. Of the 23 students in the class only four reported negative comments toward the concepts presented in the course. One student, for a number of personal reasons, psychologically "dropped out" of the course. The other 17 students reported impressive changes in the manner in which they perceived education and in their outlooks on teaching. These changes focused on the humanistic dimension of teaching. We have reported some of these comments within the sections on personal freedom and synergy. Here are comments by two students relating directly to the question posed above.

I set a goal for myself two years ago to return to college and finish my schooling . . . Until I entered this block course, I had no idea what constituted my philosophy on teaching. However, I now know that a teacher should be a very humanistic person, or someone who is fully aware of

children. This means that he/she should try to realize the students' feelings, needs, and desires, especially if the child is one with special needs."

"I have become much more humanistic in my views of education this quarter.

I have become increasingly aware of the needs of the students and want to try to help each child individually in developing and discovering his or her own views of the world."

We would like to emphasize one other aspect of the block that was reported by many students and that we think is an important outcome. In discussing their attitudes toward their own growth and development as teachers, the students consistently reported that they felt their views of teaching were changing and would probably evolve and mature with time. Their attitudes toward teaching did not appear to be fixed but rather there was an explicit expression of a commitment to the notion of change. One student said it this way:

"I am still in the process of developing attitudes toward teaching and I know I will be open to the students' suggestions and needs. I feel I will be more of a whole person and will try not to be judgmental and try not to impose my prejudices, bias or partialities on my students."

Finally, we would like to turn our attention to our personal impressions of this experience. We have reported what many of the students thought. What happened to us? What do we think?

The experience has made us more humanistic. By releasing the students to pursue their own goals and be responsible for evaluating their growth we released ourselves. We groped, we searched, we questioned, we had days with much anxiety, and we had days with great joy and excitement. In other words we experienced many different feelings and as a result our attitudes about education changed too. We grew and learned about ourselves as persons and teachers. Instead of feeling responsible for the growth of each student there was a sense of accepting the realization that our own growth was important. We felt free to express our own opinions and feelings and as a result we

we experienced ourselves as persons first, and teachers second. We are not sure how the students perceived this. Most students appeared to perceive us this way too. For a few we think this might have caused a conflict. It is not usual to watch three teachers growing, questioning, and not always having the answers to problems.

This freedom, combined with the idea of synergy, allowed us also to develop honest and open relationships with the students and with each other. Although it is not possible to prove or provide scientific data, the emphasis on synergy had an effect of helping us see each person as an individual. We realized that each person's dignity and worth was the most important aspect in the class. We tried not to label, not to compare and not to judge. We did try to accept, as painful as it was in some instances. We honestly tried to present ourselves to our students as real persons, as empathetic to their needs, and as caring persons.

We also came to love our students. About two months after the course was over one of us returned to the office and found a note. The note was written by one of the students of the class. The message in the note is not so important to report here but the ending seems to be. It was 'I love you.' Carl Rogers writes:

"Another area of my learning in interpersonal relationships has been slow and painful for me. It is most warming and fulfilling when I can let in the fact, or permit myself to feel, that someone cares for, accepts, admires, or prizes me . . . I have found it to be a very enriching thing when I can truly prize or care or love another person and when I can let that feeling flow out to him."

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